DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 316 037 FL 018 352

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TITLE Interactional Style of Teachers and Parents during Bilingual Instruction.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 14p.; In: Garcia, Herman S. and Chavez, Rudolfo Chavez. Ethnolinguistic Issues in Education, 1988. For a related document, see ED 309 002.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiotape Recordings; *Bilingual Education; *Bilingual Teacher Aides; *Bilingual Teachers; *Classroom Communication; Discourse Analysis; Elementary Education; English (Second Language); Kindergarten; Language Research; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Participation; Second Language Learning; Skill Development; Small Group Instruction; Spanish Speaking; Speech Skills; Story Telling; Student Needs; Teacher Student Relationship; *Teaching Styles; Videotape Recordings

ABSTRACT

Spanish/English bilingual kindergarten teachers and parents serving as instructional aides in the same bilingual education classrooms served as subjects in a study on classroom interaction. Audio/video recordings of small-group instruction sessions of teachers and parents were subjected to discourse analysis. A point of interest was the qualitative character of teacher/parent interaction, with specific attention to linguistic and cognitive attributes. Results indicate that both teacher and parent discourse is highly teacher-oriented, with both parents and teachers dominating lesson discourse and keeping children to the topic. Such a similarity between teachers and parents is examined with regard to the language development needs of language minority students in early childhood. (Author/MSE)

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Interactional Style of Teachers and Parents during Bilingual Instruction

Eugene E. García

Spanish/English bilingual kindergarten teachers and parents serving as instructional aides in the same bilingual education classrooms served as subjects. Audio-video recordings of small-group instruction sessions of teachers and parents were subjected to a lesson discourse analysis. Of interest was the qualitative character of teacher/parent interaction with specific attention to linguistic and cognitive attributes. Results indicated that both teacher and parent discourse is highly "teacher" oriented, with both parents and teachers dominating lesson discourse and keeping children to the topic. Such a similarity between teachers and parents is discussed with regard to language development needs of language minority students in early childhood.

The study of language continues to unfold increasing complexities in theories of linguistics, cognition, and socialization. What was once a study of linguistic structure, for example, has become today an interactive study of linguistic, psychological, and social domains, each important in its own right, but together converging in broader attempts to construct and reconstruct the nature of language. These converging perspectives acknowledge the multifaceted nature of social interaction (García, 1983).

A primary issue in language teaching for ethnolinguistic children is understanding interaction. Children from different

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linguistic cultures will use language in ways that reflect their different developmental environments (Hymes, 1974). For example, a child from a Mexican American or Native American family will not necessarily talk about the same things, or use language to accomplish the same functions as a child from an urban black or Anglo family. It is crucial that any language instruction strategy used should not penalize children for speaking the language of their environment. At the same time, it is also necessary to assess the differences between children's current language use and that which will be demanded by differing segments of the children's future societies.

Keeping in mind that language is a key requisite for educating children—for without language, education as we know it would not exist—it is important that we distinguish between the *form* of a child's language and the *function* served by that language. More than a decade ago, William Labov (1970) identified this duality in his research on "Black English," when he identified two aspects of the problem:

1. Structural conflicts of standard and nonstandard English: interference with learning ability stemming from a mismatch of linguistic structures.
2. Functional conflicts of standard and nonstandard English: interference with the desire to learn standard English stemming from a mismatch in the functions that standard and nonstandard English perform in a given culture. (p. 6)

Labov identified numerous functional conflicts between the nonstandard English of the urban black children he studied and the standard English demanded by the school. For example, Labov found that many of the children he studied were unwilling to answer questions to which the questioner obviously knew the answer. Thus an adult, holding up a picture of a helicopter and saying to a child, "What's this?" was likely to get either no answer or the response, "I don't know." It is impossible to say in this situation whether the child really doesn't know or is reasoning that the question is too easy: "Anybody knows what that is. There must be some catch to this. I will protect myself by not answering until I know more about what's going on here." This protection strategy is frequently employed by urban black children, and yet their silences or "don't know" answers are interpreted as evidence of cognitive or language delay. Geneshi (1981), in a study of bilingual Mexican-American children in

California, gave further weight to Labov's example. She pointed out that the children in her study switched languages (from English to Spanish or vice-versa) depending on their impressions of the listener's strongest language. She reported that what seemed at first glance a disturbed language-switching situation became a systematic interactional discourse strategy that maximized communication.

The expansion of language theory to incorporate an interest in both language form and function is not a recent development. In 1970, Cazden wrote:

> Study of the acquisition of language has been based on the assumption that what had to be described and explained was the acquisition of a repertoire of responses (in the terminology of behaviorism) or the acquisition of a finite set of rules for constructing utterances (in the terminology of developmental psycholinguistics). On this assumption, the school language problems of lower-class children can have two explanations: either they have acquired less language than middle-class children, or they have acquired a different language. The less-language explanation has been given various names—*cultural deprivation, deficit hypothesis, vacuum ideology*—all with the same connotation of a nonverbal child somehow emptier of language than his more-socially-fortunate age mates. The different-language explanation is forcefully argued by William Stewart and Joan Baratz. It states that all children acquire language but that many children—especially lower-class black children—acquire a dialect of English so different in structural (grammatical) features that communication in school, both oral and written, is seriously impaired by that fact alone. . . . Both the less-language and different-language views of child language are inadequate on two counts. First, they speak only of patterns of structural forms and ignore patterns of use in actual speech events. Second, they speak as if the child learns only one way to speak, which is reflected in the same fashion and to the same extent at all times. On both theoretical and practical grounds, we can no longer accept such limitations. (pp. 81-82, 83)

What Cazden was calling for is an important view of language, a focus on how the child meets the demands of situations in which language is used.

Moreover, within the last few years, research in language acquisition has shifted from the study of one native language (Brown, 1973; González, 1970) to the comparative study of children from diverse linguistic societies (Bowerman, 1975; Braine, 1976; Durán, 1981). The study reported herein deals with young children in classroom situations in which their native language, Spanish, and second language, English, are used as media of instruction by their parents (serving as teachers' aides) and the regular classroom teacher.

THE PROBLEM

This study provides an analysis of a set of audio-video-recorded, teacher-child and mother-child interactions that were studied to determine the instructional characteristics of the interactions. Specifically, I sought to identify which aspects of these interactions were similar to previous conceptual treatments of teacher-student interactions during formal instruction time (lessons) at microinteractional levels (Mehan, 1979). This type of analysis is based on the notion that teaching is a fundamental act of discourse (García & Carrasco, 1981).

With respect to the empirical determination of whether mothers engage in teaching situations, two preinvestigatory considerations strongly suggested an affirmative response. First, all the mothers and children in this study were part of the bilingual/bicultural effort, which was voluntary in nature. Therefore, it was clear that mothers were very much interested in their children learning both languages. Second, all mothers served as instructors on a cooperative basis. Their duties included both curriculum development and implementation. Therefore, although professional guidance was provided, all mothers served essentially as teachers in the school. These preconditions, which indicate that the mothers were involved in an instructional process during the mother-child interactions, form the data for the study.

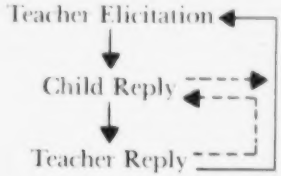
In performing an empirical analysis of mothers serving as instructors, the Mehan interactional analysis model for analyzing the sequential organization of speech acts within classroom lessons was used. This model concentrates on the sequential characteristics of teacher initiations, followed by student responses and teacher evaluations. This form of interaction analysis takes into consideration the teacher and student utterances, topic selection, and conversational management in turn taking. I hypothesized that the original Mehan model of instructional interaction sequencing would assist in describing the similarities and differences for the present mother-student and teacher-student interactions. However, some modification of the Mehan model was necessary to accommodate the conversational data I actually encountered (see Table 1).

As indicated earlier, the present analysis is based on results reported by Mehan (1979) regarding elementary teaching styles. Specifically, Mehan found that elementary teachers when "giving a lesson" tend to:

1. Begin a topic-oriented instructional exchange between themselves and their students by an elicitation statement (for example, "What color is this block?"). Mehan had divided these elicitation statements into four categories that depended on the cognitive complexity of the intended response: (1) choice, (2) product, (3) process, and (4) meta-process. (See Table 1 for specific definitial characteristics.) At times, teachers also use directives ("point to the red block") or informatives ("this is a block") in their lessons. Directives and informatives are used less often and are not intended to elicit a student response, and
2. Terminate topic-oriented instructional exchanges between themselves and their students with an evaluation statement, such as, "That was excellent." Table 1 presents specific categories of such teacher replies.

How do students perform during their lessons? In response to the topic-oriented teacher elicitations, students tend most often to reply in accordance with the teacher's elicitation. However, they may also: (1) not reply, (2) attempt to change the topic (and therefore bid to control the discourse topic), or (3) react in a negative manner, repeat the previous teacher statement, or indicate nonunderstanding of the teacher statement. Table 1 details some possible replies.

Mehan describes the "total" lesson discourse with the following interaction model.



Most formal lessons follow the solid lines of the diagrammed model: teacher elicits, students reply, and teacher replies. However, the dotted lines indicate that at times the instruction is cut short when the teacher does not reply, as illustrated below.

"What color is this?"	Teacher Elicitation
"Red."	Child's Reply

Table 1

Definition of interactional characteristics for the modified Mehan system

I. Teacher Mother Initiations
  A. Elicitations
    1. Choice: An elicitation act in which the initiator provides responses in elicitation itself. ("Is it blue or green?")
    2. Product: An elicitation act to which the respondent is to provide factual response. ("What is this?")
    3. Process: An elicitation act which asks the respondent for opinions and interpretations. ("What's he doing?")
    4. Meta-process: An elicitation act which asks the respondent to be reflective on the process of reasoning itself. ("Why does he?")
  B. Directives: These are preparatory exchanges designed to have respondents take specific actions. ("Look here.")
  C. Informatives: Acts that pass on information, facts, opinions, or ideas. ("This girl's dress is blue.")

II. Child Reply
  A. No reply: Child does not answer initiation acts, silence for a 2-second period.
  B. Topic-relevant reply
    1. Choice: Choice response relevant to the initiator's topic. ("blue")
    2. Product: Product response relevant to the initiator's topic. ("cat")
    3. Process: Process response relevant to the initiator's topic. ("playing with a dog.")
    4. Meta-process: Meta-process response relevant to the initiator's topic. ("'Cause he's not scared.")

    (Responses were also scored: 1 if irrelevant to initiator's topic, and 2 if relevant to the initiator's previous topic.)
  C. Bid: These constitute statements which attempt to gain the floor, that is, change the topic. These can be considered as initiation by the child. ("What is this?")
  D. Reaction: Negative acts taken in response to a directive. ("I don't want to.")
  E. Repetition: Child repeats the previous mother statement: (1) partially, (2) exactly, (3) expanded.
  F. Don't understand: Child indicates he did not understand initiator. ("What?")

III. Teacher Mother Reply
  A. Repetition: Mother repeats previous child utterance: (1) partially, (2) exactly, (3) expanded.
  B. Evaluation: Mother (1) accepts (positive) or (2) rejects (negative) previous child utterance. ("O.K., that's good"; "not that way.")
  C. Prompts: Statements given in response to incorrect, incomplete or misunderstood replies. ("There are three.")
  D. Child Topic Initiator: Initiating statements in response to initiations by the child. (These were earlier designated as Child Bids.) ("There are two tigers.")

At other times the exchange may be extended:

"What color is this?"	Teacher Elicitation
"I think it is red."	Child Reply
"That's right."	Teacher Reply
"Do you like red?"	Child Reply
"I love red."	Teacher Reply

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Using the above analytical scheme, the present analysis was to assess the instructional style of the teachers and parents serving as teachers. Specifically, the following questions were asked:

1. What type of instructional style does the parent use when formally fulfilling the role of classroom instructor?
2. Does the parents' instructional style differ from that reported for teachers with the same student (kindergarten) population?
3. Does the parents' instructional style differ from that of the "regular" teacher in the same classroom?

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

To participate in the study, children and mothers were selected from bilingual education kindergarten classrooms at three schools in the Phoenix Elementary School District. Specific selection of children and mothers who would participate in the study was dependent on the availability of a parent or grandparent to serve as a parent/teacher for at least two afternoons a week, and the willingness of the parent or grandparent to serve as a parent/teacher.

When these conditions were met, student and parent participants were selected randomly. A minimum of 6 parents and a maximum of 10 parents per classroom were selected as participants.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Because it was not practical to audio-video record all parent/teachers, two were selected from each classroom. These were selected randomly from a list of parent/teachers provided by the teacher in each classroom. In addition, each teacher was also audio-video recorded for purposes of teaching style analysis. The teachers and parents selected for observation were scheduled for

audio-video tape recordings during small-group lessons once every two weeks for a total period of 12 weeks.

Both teachers and parents were recorded while giving two types of lesson during each day they were observed: story-telling lessons and skill-development lessons. Story-telling lessons centered on the sharing of a written or oral story. Lessons included fictionalized material such as "Los Tres Osos," Dr. Suess, and the like, and nonfiction material, such as "Cinco de Mayo," George Washington's biography, and other content material. Story-telling lessons were characterized by their informality. Skill development lessons were more organized around a specific academic skill (color identification, phonic discrimination of sounds, and the like). Skill-oriented lessons were more formal than the story-telling sessions.

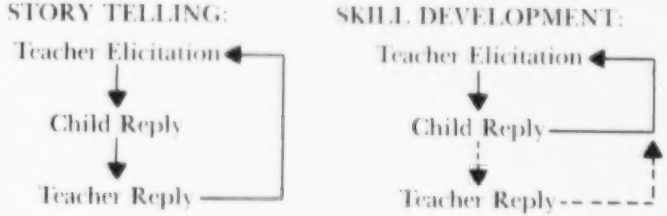
The two categories of lessons were derived from a one-month, preinvestigatory observation period in the classrooms. Observers were in the classroom two to three hours, three days per week, in an attempt to isolate discourse strategies used by children and adults. Notes from these observations led us to distinguish between the two types of lessons identified above.

RESULTS

Teaching Style Analysis Results: Teachers

Table 2 presents the percentages of teacher and parent/grandparent initiations, child replies, and teacher and parent/grandparent replies during audio-video recorded lessons for randomly selected teachers and parents. These data are presented by language (Spanish and English) and by lesson function (story telling or specific skill development).

Teacher initiation statements tended to be dominated by product-type elicitations, as well as process-type elicitations, with a smaller percentage of directives and informatives in both languages, especially during story-telling lessons. Child replies during these interactions were dominated by child product and process replies to teacher initiations. Teacher replies consisted primarily of repetitions and evaluative remarks, the latter almost always positive. The teacher-student lesson discourse style might best be diagrammed as follows, with a heavy weight on product and process type interaction:



However, it is important to note that teacher initiations were of the process type (as were child replies) some 25 to 40 percent of the time during story telling. This high level of process interaction was not observed during specific skill-development lessons. Moreover, the interactions for story-telling lessons were predominantly in English, while specific skill-development lessons were in Spanish. These teachers conformed to Mehan's (1979) teacher instructional patterns.

Table 2

Percentage of teacher and parent/grandparent initiation, child reply, and teacher and parent/grandparent reply during audio-video recorded lessons by language (Spanish or English) and lesson function (story telling or specific skill development)

Teacher-Parent Initiation	Choice		Product		Process		Meta-Process		Directives		Informatives		Total	
	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E
Teacher-Story	0	2	27	30	20	38	2	4	10	18	16	8	30	70
Teacher-Skill	19	10	45	18	10	3	0	0	20	44	11	25	76	24
Parent-Story	15	1	41	3	1	16	1	0	22	27	7	20	40	60
Parent-Skill	11	0	16	0	4	0	0	0	45	0	24	0	100	0

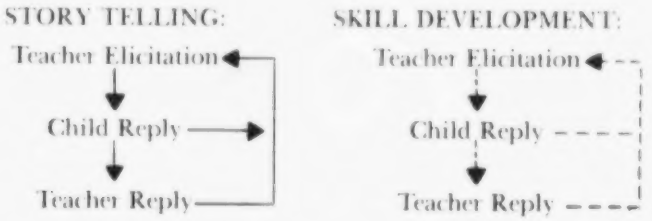
Child Reply	Choice		Product		Process		Meta-Process		Directives		Informatives		Total	
	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E
Teacher-Story	5	5	32	34	33	34	4	6	12	16	14	5	35	65
Teacher-Skill	13	7	38	36	5	7	0	0	28	42	16	4	60	40
Parent-Story	11	12	37	21	15	10	2	0	30	53	5	27	56	44
Parent-Skill	0	0	32	50	8	0	0	0	37	27	8	23	91	9

Teacher-Parent Reply	Repetition						Evaluation				Child Topic Initiation				Total	
	S			E			S		E		Prompt					
	1	2	3	1	2	3	P	N	P	N	S	E	S	E	S	E
Teacher-Story	8	23	6	7	38	6	25	4	17	0	14	17	10	15	44	86
Teacher-Skill	7	12	10	5	42	0	35	3	7	9	28	5	1	33	66	34
Parent-Story	0	33	13	0	35	5	0	7	10	15	22	0	25	35	64	36
Parent-Skill	0	20	2	0	75	0	20	11	25	0	4	0	23	0	92	8

Teaching Style Analysis Results: Parents

Initiations by parent grandparent during specific skill-development lessons tended to be dominated by directives and informatives. For parent grandparents, 80 percent of initiations were either directives or informatives during these lessons. These two categories of initiations do not encourage participation by the child in the lesson. However, during story-telling lessons, product (36 to 41 percent) and process (15 to 16 percent) initiations were evident. In addition, story telling initiations were nearly equally distributed between Spanish and English; specific skill-development initiations were all in Spanish.

Child replies for parent grandparent-led lessons were much like those observed for teacher-led lessons. However, parent replies were dominated more by bids, repetitions, and evaluations. Also, parent interactions had a higher relative percentage of child topic initiation than did teachers' interactions. Therefore, parents tended to "follow" the child's topic-change attempts more often than did the teachers. As an illustration, the following lesson discourse diagram is meant to describe the parent teaching style:



The parents' story telling style was much like that of teachers. However, the skill-development style shown above (by using dotted indicator lines) emphasizes that this style was dominated by initiations. That is, because the teaching discourse was dominated by directives and informatives a majority of the time, the child was not often formally requested to become a participant in the lesson.

SUMMARY

Teachers tended to conform to Mehan's (1979) instructional interaction strategies. Parents were much like teachers during

story telling but during skill-development lessons did not elicit child participation. However, when teachers and parents elicited participation, they did so with product and process type statements during story telling lessons and product type statements during specific skill development lessons.

Child replies for both teacher and parent/grandparent lessons were characterized by a high percentage of appropriate child replies. The occurrence of appropriate child replies was expected. The occurrence of child bids during parent/grandparent skill development lessons, however, continues to indicate the child's inattentiveness or unwillingness to "hold" to the lesson topic.

Teacher and parent/grandparent replies were quite similar. They were dominated by repetitions and evaluations. However, parents tended to follow children's topic change bids more often than teachers did. This finding is particularly interesting because it suggests that children were more likely to gain control of the lesson with parents than with teachers. Although instructors should remain "in control," they should not be inflexible. Parents may have been more flexible in these cases.

CONCLUSION

The study reported herein examined bilingual instructor-student interaction under conditions in which both parents and teachers served as instructors. Previous research with ethnolinguistic students has suggested a potential mismatch between the culture of the home and that of the school (Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974). Similarly, previous research has suggested potential discrepancies in specific styles of interaction (Laosa, 1983; Zentella, 1981). Results of the present study extend this previous work.

The present study's analysis of instructional styles for parents and teachers indicated that:

1. Teachers tended to provide an instructional style often reported in the literature: they elicited student responses, evaluated those responses within identifiably linked lesson topics, and tended to hold students to the topic.
2. Parents' instructional style was much like that of the teachers. However, parents tended to dominate instructional discourse and did not elicit child participation as often as did teachers. Parents/grandparents were more flexible in allowing student-oriented topic shifts than teachers.

Teachers fulfilled the general expectation Mehan (1979) reported. However, they did not invite instructional interaction in other than the most communicatively simple mode, inviting student participation mostly with product or choice elicitations. This type of elicitation style may be particularly problematic for bilingual students, who may not be challenged by this style of instructional discourse either to use their native language or to express more complex language functions. Nor may they acquire these complex functions because of the failure of instructors to provide the opportunity for their use. It is possible that teachers (and maybe parents) perceive the bilingual repertoire of the child as a debilitating characteristic and act to simplify instructional interaction. Of course, this is but one of several possible explanations of the phenomenon. Independent of its causal links to a number of potential variables, the occurrence of a noninviting instructional style is well-documented in the study. Future work should attempt to extrapolate this style's potential negative or positive relationship to the development of communicative competence and academic achievement.

The mother-child interaction data suggest that mothers tend to be less inviting of students' interaction at the outset of an instructional segment, but much more inviting of a student's efforts to change topics once the instructional interaction is set in motion. The first finding can be related to Laosa's (1983) work with Hispanic mothers. Laosa suggested that such differences in discourse strategies between mother and children are a function of schooling. He studied Hispanic mothers from several ethnic groups and socioeconomic strata, and reported that the mother's level of schooling was the primary factor related to mother-child discourse style. Specifically, he reported that the more years the mother remained in school, the more that mother's interaction with her preschool child resembled teacher-student interaction. This style is much like the English style reported by García and Carrasco (1981) for bilingual Spanish-English mother-child interaction and the style reported herein for teachers.

The present study, therefore, confirms previous work related to the potential gap between home and school culture. It does so by a microanalysis of instructional style of parents and teachers. The study also extends the previous work. In particular, parent and teacher lesson interaction with students was not found to differ under non-skill-building contexts. In addition, parents were much more willing to enhance interaction by responding to

students' desires to change from those specific topics chosen by the parents. Teachers, on the other hand, were much more rigid in holding students to the topic.

Further research of this type would do much either to delineate the particular components of the home versus school culture issue or disconfirm its importance in instructional interaction. Such research is of particular significance to the ethnolinguistic bilingual student, whose academic future seems critically related to the nature and success of instructional communication.

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